

SPECIAL SERIES—INTRODUCTION

A Few Words About *The Quest for Mercy*

Roger Bulger, MD, FACP, is a man with a good memory and a great heart. Last year, we wrote several colleagues to announce that THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE had weathered its time of troubles and to request that they keep the journal in mind when they wrote papers of exceptional merit. Dr. Bulger remembered that letter as he prepared the manuscript of a book on mercy and managed care. Reviewers urged him to seek wide distribution of the finished piece, perhaps via the lay press. He thought the journal would be a better venue since his work is aimed at physicians and other clinicians, including young physicians and medical students. His goal is to engage more than those in medicine, however. He also hopes to touch patients, families, policymakers, and indeed the public as a whole.

Dr. Bulger's book addresses managed care and managed cost, of course. It also addresses sickness and healing, hope and despair, relationships, oaths, populations, prevention, and patients. In an afterward, Dr. Bulger discusses the tensions between idealism and reality, between our profession and our lives.

Dr. Bulger writes with authority and passion. He trained in medicine at the University of Washington and Harvard, was medical director of the University of Washington Hospital, and then served on the faculty at Duke University Medical Center before he became Executive Officer of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, Chancellor and Dean of the Medical School at the University of Massachusetts at Worcester, President of the University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston, and now, President of the Association of Academic Health Centers in Washington, D.C. He has published scores of papers and chapters, as well as three books on subjects ranging from infectious diseases to medical education, humanities, Hippocrates, and, not surprisingly, academic health centers. He is invited to speak throughout the world. His authority and passion come not only from his life in academia and practice. He is also a patient who has dodged a fatal bullet not only once, but, we hope, twice.

This is part one of three that will be published in THE WESTERN JOURNAL OF MEDICINE in November and December 1997 and January 1998. What a splendid way

to give thanks, to celebrate the holidays, and to start a new year. The entire book will be published by Carden Jennings Publishing Company, Inc., (1224 West Main St., Suite 200, Charlottesville, VA 22903-2858; (804) 979-8034; fax (804) 979-4025; e-mail wjm@cjp.com) and available for \$10.00. Its price is low because it is partly subsidized by support from the John P. McGovern Foundation.

This book will become a classic. Eric Cassell recently listed some of his favorite medical books as he exhorted physicians to read them.¹ He noted that physicians of course need to know about the march of molecular medicine, pathophysiology, and modern diagnosis and treatment. He said that physicians also need to put patients, not just diseases or organ systems, at center stage. They need to understand health as well as sickness, souls as well as bodies, meaning as well as behavior. I would add that physicians need to know themselves, to review their values, and to refresh their energy, especially now. I would therefore endorse the following books to accompany Dr. Bulger's as we join together in the noble quest for mercy:

- *The Plague* by Albert Camus (Random House)
- *Man's Search for Meaning* by Viktor Frankl (Simon and Schuster)
- *Self Renewal: The Individual and the Innovative Society* by John W. Gardner (WW Norton and Co., revised)
- *The Way of Life. An American Version* by Lao Tzu (Putnam Publishing Group)
- *On Doctoring: Stories, Poems, Essays* edited by Richard Reynolds and John Stone (Simon and Schuster)

I hope this series will lift you as you read, reflect, recall, renew.

LINDA HAWES CLEVER, MD

REFERENCE

1. Cassell E. Why should doctors read medical books? *Ann Int Med* 1997; 127:576-578